



**STATEMENT BY HON. GIFTY E. KUSI, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR
TARKWA NSUAEM AND MINORITY SPOKES PERSON ON GENDER AND
CHILDREN ON THE CAMPAIGN TO BRING BACK OUR GIRLS WHO WERE
KIDNAPPED BY BOKO HARAM IN NIGERIA**

Mr. Speaker, the world woke up on the 15th of April, 2014 with terrifying news of the kidnapping of over 200 girls on the night of 14–15 April 2014, by a group of Boko Haram militants who attacked the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Nigeria. They broke into the school, shooting the guards and killing one soldier. It was reported that the students were taken away in trucks, possibly into the Konduga area of the Sambisa Forest where Boko Haram were known to have fortified camps. Houses in Chibok were also burnt down in the incident. The school had been closed for four weeks prior to the attack due to the deteriorating security situation, but students from multiple schools in the district had been called in to take final exams in physics.

It was reported and later confirmed that the Nigerian military had four hour advance notice of the attack but could not mobilize forces for reinforcements.

It is alleged that the students are being forced into Islam and into marriage with members of Boko Haram, with a bride price of ₦2,000 each (\$12.50). It is also alleged that many of the students were taken to the neighbouring countries of Chad and Cameroon, with sightings reported of the militants crossing borders with the students. Sightings of the students by villagers living in the Sambisa Forest which is considered a refuge for Boko Haram has also been confirmed. The Nigerian police said they were still unclear as to the exact number of students who were kidnapped. They had asked parents to provide documents, so that an official count could be made since school records were damaged in the attack. On 4 May, 2014, the Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, spoke publicly about the kidnapping for the first time, saying the government was doing everything it could to find the missing girls.

On 5 May, a video footage in which Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau claimed responsibility for the kidnappings emerged. Shekau claimed that "Allah instructed me to sell them...I will carry out his instructions." and "Slavery is allowed in my religion, and I shall capture people and make them slaves. He said the girls should not have been in the school and instead they should be married since girls as young as nine are suitable for marriage.

Chibok is primarily a Christian village and Shekau acknowledged that many of the girls seized were not Muslims: "The girls that have not accepted Islam, they are now gathered in numbers...and we treat them well the way the Prophet Muhammed treated the infidels he seized."

A journalist-brokered deal to secure the release of the girls in exchange for prisoners held in Nigerian jails was scrapped at a late stage on 24 May 2014 after President Goodluck Jonathan consulted with U.S., Israeli, French and British foreign ministers in Paris, where the consensus was that no deals should be struck with terrorists, and that a solution involving force was required.

The United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UNICEF condemned the abduction, as well as the UN Security Council which also warned that serious action is to be taken against

Boko Haram militants for abducting Girls. Parents and others took to social media to complain about the government's perceived slow and inadequate response. On 30 April and 1 May, protests demanding more government action were held in several Nigerian cities. Most parents, however, were afraid to speak publicly for fear their daughters would be targeted for reprisal. On 3 and 4 May, protests were held in major Western cities including Los Angeles and London. At the same time, the hash tag #BringBackOurGirls trended globally on Twitter as the story continued to spread and by 11 May it had attracted 2.3 million tweets.

Several online petitions were created to pressure the Nigerian government to act against the kidnapping. On 30 April, hundreds marched on the National Assembly to demand government and military action against the kidnapers.

The President of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria called on Muslims to fast and pray "in order to seek Allah's intervention in this precarious time." Sa'ad Abubakar III, the Sultan of Sokoto, has also called for prayers and intensified efforts to rescue the students. On 9 May, Governor Kashim Shettima of Borno State called on all Muslims and Christians to join in "three days of prayers and fasting." On the same day, Muslims in Cameroon have been calling on fellow believers not to marry any of these girls should they be offered to them. The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia Sheikh Abdulaziz Al al-Sheikh joined other religious leaders in the Muslim world to condemn the kidnappings, describing Boko Haram as misguided and intent on smearing the name of Islam. He stated that Islam is against kidnapping, and that marrying kidnapped girls is not permitted.

International governmental responses have also been wonderful. The United Kingdom, France and the United States have sent experts to Nigeria to assist in the search for the students. The experts were drawn from various governmental departments, military, and law-enforcements, specializing in "intelligence, investigations, hostage negotiation, and information-sharing and victim assistance

French President Francois Hollande held a summit in Paris with Nigeria and its neighbours, namely Cameroon, Niger, Chad and Benin to tackle the issue.

China, Israel and Canada have joined the international effort to free the schoolgirls and have made available "any useful information acquired by their satellites and intelligence services."

At a meeting in Tehran with Nigerian Ambassador to the Islamic Republic Tukur Mani, the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, has pledged Iran's help to Nigeria to resolve the issue of the abduction

A social media campaign launched to #bringbackourgirls has generated more than one million tweets and swelled into a global outcry, with famous figures including Angelina Jolie, Malala Yousafzai and Michelle Obama, Former First Lady, H.E. Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings and the First Lady of Ghana, H.E. Lordina Mahama joining the calls for Nigeria's government to recover the remaining girls as few of them had managed to escape.

At a one-day extraordinary session of ECOWAS Heads of State in Accra, the Nigeria President Goodluck Jonathan assured his colleagues in the sub-regional group that he was "doing everything possible" to resolve the burning issue. ECOWAS promised to support him but have also agreed that armed attacks were not on the cards of ECOWAS. In a communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, the leaders welcomed the measures adopted by the Nigerian government to end the insurgency by Boko Haram. The summit also urged the Nigerian government to pursue national dialogue and reconciliation.

In Ghana, women's rights activists have also joined the bring back our girls campaign and are calling on the Nigerian government and stakeholders in the sub-region to take pragmatic measures to ensure the immediate release of the abducted school girls without any further delay. In a communiqué issued by the three women's NGO's in Ghana, Network for Women's Rights in Ghana, NETRIGHT, Coalition on Domestic Violence Legislation in Ghana and Women's Manifesto in Ghana, they stated that the continuous detention of the girls is a matter of grave concern to all.

Mr. Speaker, with the foregoing, it is significant to note that the kidnapping of the girls has touched many hearts and it is heart breaking when one considers the effects it will have on girls' education. Mohammed Dunoma, the chairman of the local parent-teachers association in Chibok, Nigeria is on record to have said that many villagers are now reluctant to allow their daughters to go to school. Boko Haram, whose name means "western education is sinful", is an ever-present threat, he says: "We don't know when they will come."

I want to encourage Nigeria to do more. I want to urge all of us to join in this global campaign to bring back our girls by signing unto a petition to world leaders on: <http://www.gchange.org.en-GB/petitions/over-200-girls-are-missing-in-Nigeria-please-help-find-them-bringbackourgirls#>. It is sad and could happen to our daughters and nieces. Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence.

